



## Rare Species Programmatic Biological Assessment

### Introduction

Many visitor use activities and associated park operations in Shenandoah National Park (SHEN) occur in or adjacent to habitat occupied by the Shenandoah salamander or the small whorled pogonia; both species are listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Based on federal law, these activities need to be evaluated to ensure that threatened and endangered species are not jeopardized by park actions. These actions have not been assessed, so park staff members have sought funding to complete a programmatic Biological Assessment that would characterize the impacts of the majority of recurring federal actions (e.g. vista clearing, trail maintenance, gypsy moth BT treatments, road maintenance, hazard tree removal, powerline clearing, etc.) or anticipated actions (Rock Outcrop Management Plan implementation, etc.) on ESA listed species in SHEN. This project will help ensure that visitor use and associated park operations are not jeopardizing ESA listed species and that these actions are conducted under full compliance with the ESA.



*Shenandoah salamander*

### Management Needs

The Shenandoah salamander is an endangered species that is only found within the boundaries of Shenandoah National Park. The small whorled pogonia, though well distributed outside the park, is a threatened species with restricted distribution in Shenandoah. For proper management and conservation of rare species, a review of the impacts of visitor use and associated ongoing park operations is needed.

In addition, section 7 of the ESA [16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.] outlines the procedures for Federal interagency cooperation to conserve Federally listed species and designated critical habitats. Section 7(a)(2) states that each Federal agency shall, in consultation with the Secretary, insure that any action they authorize, fund, or carry out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat. In fulfilling these requirements, each agency must use the best scientific and commercial data available and assess how park activities are

affecting threatened and endangered species.

Park operations or authorizations needing ESA consultation are varied and include (but are not limited to): trail maintenance (associated with visitor hiking), overlook maintenance for visitor use of scenic vistas, hazard tree removal for visitor safety, rock climbing, backcountry camping (and backcountry campsite restoration), road maintenance, power line maintenance, etc. Completion of this project will help to guide those activities and will ensure that they are not jeopardizing the continued existence of protected species in the park. Furthermore, completion of the assessment will also assist the park in meet legal requirements associated with ESA consultation and will result in improved public understanding of what is known about park listed species.



*Small whorled pogonia*

### Current Procedures

Park staff members have now successfully competed for funding to support this effort and are working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on an Interagency Agreement to implement the project.

The completion of a programmatic Biological Assessment would help address a major regulatory task needed for compliance on a variety of park actions. Following concurrence from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) or completion of a Biological Opinion and associated incidental take statement (completed by USFWS), the majority of parkwide operations could continue indefinitely (with 5 year reviews from USFWS) with full compliance under the Endangered Species Act.

In its development, the Biological Assessment will also allow for a critical review of park operations and allow for adjustment of those operations to limit potential or known negative impacts on ESA listed species.